

A Peaceable Walk with the Children of Men

Remarks by K. Newell Dayley
at the funeral service for
Quentin Richards Nordgren
October 21, 1999

I thank you, Grace and the Nordgren family, for the honor of speaking on this occasion. The proceedings seemed calm until I stood a few moments ago and saw who is here. There are many present who could speak much better than I about this remarkable man. I am humbled by this responsibility.

We've heard remarks from a number of family members. It seems my role is to speak for those who belonged to Quentin's BYU family. I can testify that your husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather lived the same way at the university that you have described him in the home. He was absolutely a saint. Over the years, his presence has often reminded me of the words of the prophet Mormon: "I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven. And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men." (Moroni 7:3-4) I judge the same of Quentin, because of his "peaceable walk with the children of men."

There is no greater joy than celebrating a life well lived. We all knew the same Quentin because he lived a life of integrity. If we knew him in one situation, we would know him in another. He wasn't a different person in the Church, at work, in the community, or at home. There was only one Quentin. That's what I celebrate most about his life. He was a man of integrity.

I want to accomplish two things today: share some of my personal experiences with Quentin that will illustrate the kind of life he lived and then share a few reminders from the gospel of Jesus Christ that I believe he would like us to consider on this occasion.

My introduction to Quentin Nordgren came on the occasion of my first registration as a freshman at BYU. As I entered the Smith Fieldhouse I had little understanding of the process I was expected to follow in order to register for classes and begin pursuing a major in music. Walking up to a table identified as "Music," I looked around and noticed a man with kind eyes and a peaceful demeanor. Those kind eyes drew me to him. He invited me to sit across from him and asked: "How can I help you?" I said: "I think I need to register here." He responded: "What do you intend to study?" As a high school student I had tried to learn music theory and composition on my own, ordering books advertised in music magazines and trying to understand and practice the skills they presented. I responded, quite naively, that I'd like to study Music Theory. without the slightest suspicion that a Music Theorist was, at that moment, acting as my advisor. He seemed enthusiastic to help me plan a course load for the semester, took me personally around the Fieldhouse to pick up registration cards, and helped me finalize registration. I thanked him and departed. Imagine my surprise the first day of classes when I discovered that he

had put me in two of his classes! I felt an overwhelming desire to do well in those classes. That semester I began a precious, wonderfully positive, beneficial forty two year relationship with the man with “kind eyes.”

As a teacher and mentor Quentin Nordgren was always organized, prepared, and concerned about student learning. Students never wondered about the purpose of his course, what they were expected to accomplish, how they would be evaluated, or his willingness to give extra time and help to those in need. They knew he could be trusted because he was always ready to answer a question, illustrate a principle, offer an insight, or suggest resources that might lead to deeper understanding. His focus was on student learning rather than on his presentation of a topic or subject. He was a master teacher.

One of my early assignments as a member of the BYU faculty was teaching Music Theory under the supervision of Quentin Nordgren. He taught me by example to be organized, prepared, and concerned about student learning. A few years later, when I was appointed to serve as Chair of the Music Department, he willingly accepted my invitation to serve as Associate Chair and continued to mentor me in that difficult assignment until his retirement. During our work together in that setting, he taught me much about humility, selfless service, and precision.

Quentin loved to focus on detail. He loved honesty and truth so much that every task, even less important administrative tasks, demanded his full attention and commitment. Everything he did was done right and on time.

But what I enjoyed most was that he radiated the pure love of Christ. Only once can I remember him getting mildly agitated and it was in a situation that would have made most of us very angry. In contrast, his agitation lasted only a few moments and then it passed and he was once again radiating peace. Quentin was a conduit through which the love of Christ could pass to the rest of us.

A couple of years ago Elder Eyring gave a Devotional talk at BYU about the five attributes of great learners. Remember Quentin as I list those attributes. I believe they describe him perfectly. First, great learners seek correction. Second, they keep commitments. Third, they work hard. Fourth, they help others learn. And fifth, they expect and overcome resistance. Quentin was a great learner because he sought correction, kept his commitments, worked hard, helped others learn, and expected and overcame resistance. What a great legacy of learning he left with us.

Quentin didn't just come to work most days. He walked to work and he walked home. I loved his gait. He was relaxed, with a long stride and a confident bearing. Even his walking was filled with peace and joy.

Why is there so much joy and hope here today? I think it's because we sense that Quentin is full of joy and gratitude. The Lord has said: “Thou shalt live together in love, inasmuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die [but] those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them [.]” (D&C 42:45-46) Even though we weep this

day for the loss of a loved one, we are filled with hope and faith because we sense that death was sweet for Quentin. He died firm in the faith for he loved Christ with all of his heart. I have received an assurance that this is true.

“But why did Quentin leave us now?” some are asking. “Why couldn’t he have stayed longer?” One answer is: “Because he had completed his earthly mission and was prepared to move on.” “But what is he doing?” we wonder. The prophet Alma wrote, “...all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men. Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know.” And then he adds, almost parenthetically, “And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man.” (Alma 40:8-10) Quentin completed the time appointed to him and has moved into another sphere where he is learning new and wonderful things already and will soon be teaching those he has been prepared to teach. He did everything here that he needed to do; not everything he wanted to do, but everything he needed to do. As I read his short autobiography the past couple of days, I have been impressed that he accomplished all that was needed. He slipped away from us rather quickly because he is needed elsewhere.

Concerning our state between death and the resurrection, Alma also wrote: “Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life. And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.” (Alma 40:11-12) And so now the man who had such “a peaceable walk with the children of men” is himself enjoying a state of rest from troubles, cares, and sorrow where peace naturally abounds. He is joyful. He rejoices in his posterity, in his friends, and in the work he has completed.

What will Quentin be doing in his new environment? Let’s review a portion of the vision President Joseph F. Smith received on October 3, 1918. “I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from this mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.” (D&C 138:57) I have no doubt that he is qualified and worthy to accept such an assignment. He will continue to be a powerful force for good.

Several times during the past three days I have had the thought press upon me that I ought to share some things that I know Quentin would like to say if he were here. First, he would remind us: “They that have faith in Christ will cleave unto every good thing.” (Moroni 7:28) He cleaved to every good thing. We should follow his example.

Second, he would remind us to recognize, confront, and overcome our weaknesses through faith in Christ. He would remind us of the promise of Christ: “Because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.” (Ether 12:37) Quentin was continually working on his weaknesses. I’m confident that his resulting strength has given him a place in his Father’s mansions.

Third, he would invite us to read the words of father Lehi: “Redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.” (2 Nephi 2:6-8) I find it rather significant, on this occasion, that “Grace” would appear twice in this passage and be at the center of Quentin’s salvation – and ours as well, but in a slightly different way!

Fourth, he would have us remember the words of Jacob: “But behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.” (2 Nephi 9:18) His joy is full and he hopes those he loves will follow the Master’s voice that they might join with him one day in a fullness of joy.

And finally, he would testify: “Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God. Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice.” (2 Nephi 9:49, 52) He loved righteousness and avoided sin through constant prayer, including honest expressions of gratitude to his Father in Heaven in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Quentin Richards Nordgren – what a wonderful husband, father, friend, and associate. As I said earlier, there is no greater joy than celebrating a life well lived.

I testify that God, our Eternal Father, lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. By the power of the Holy Ghost I also know that a man of Christ has departed and that he beckons us to follow. He is an anchor for his family and for all of us fortunate enough to have known him. Where he is we may one day be, if we follow his example of Christ-like living and love. He will be waiting with open arms, “kind eyes,” loving words, and peace. I pray this day that we will always remember and celebrate the life of Quentin Richards Nordgren, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.